

Shall We Tolerate Tuberculosis in Our Dairy Herds?

The Serious Aspects of the Situation and Methods of Safeguarding the Healthy Herd Discussed

By Professors H. Barton and E. S. Archibald



The herd at Heart's Delight Farm is as healthy as it is beautiful. The tuberculin test is used regularly.
—Cut courtesy Holstein-Friesian World.

A \$2,000,000 Disease

Prof. H. Barton, Dept. of Animal Husbandry, Macdonald College, Que.

At least two million dollars is the present annual toll exacted by bovine tuberculosis in Canada; yet we like to speak of our live stock as being free of disease. Other countries may share the tuberculosis situation with us, but, for a comparatively new country, our position calls for little boasting. Moreover, information from various sources indicates that in spite of certain combative efforts the disease is probably increasing.

In times of food shortage such enormous waste seems most regrettable. The problem of at least checking, if not eradicating this increasing menace, may not be easy of solution, and perhaps, because of war conditions, presents no immediate opportunity for being dealt with in any very large or complete way. Nevertheless, it should not be dismissed. Something more than is being done now is possible and is imperative.

It seems to me that before deciding on any operation plan a proper appreciation of the situation must be made. It may not be possible to overcome every obstacle, but, in any case, the obstacles should be located. It is the purpose of this article to find and to briefly analyze a number of the more important of them.

Attitude of Stock Owners.

The first and most important of all obstacles is the prevailing attitude of the stock owners toward the disease. They are content to tolerate and harbor it, making little individual and no collective effort to eradicate it. Why this attitude, then, if the disease is as destructive as the above figures represent?

First, the nature of the disease and its behavior; it varies in virulence; it is often slow to claim the individual victim, while, at the same time, many others may have been infected and

the general effects of it attributed to other causes.

Second, the loss is apt to be much distributed. Third, it is possible to traffic in diseased animals.

Two general methods may be employed in meeting the above obstacles—education and regulation. We have not had anything like enough of either. The agricultural press, and every other educational agency, cannot overdo the lesson. If a large representation of our stock men really understood tuberculosis, its dissemination, and its recognition, the fight would be almost won. There is urgent need for continuous educational propaganda in these three phases: Nature of the disease, dissemination, diagnosis. Knowledge of these three is essential for both prevention and eradication. Technical treatment of them for the public is no good. It must be commonplace, popular presentation, based, of course, on technical teaching. In a word, simplified application is what is needed in educational work.

Facilities For Dissemination.

Second obstacle—facilities for dissemination. These, of course, arise out of the first and also because of insufficient regulation. Exchange, purchase, and sale of stock for farm use must in any case tend to distribute the disease, but, unfortunately, only to a very limited degree is any attempt made to minimize this distribution. Our auction sales are glaring illustrations of this. They afford, perhaps, our largest channel for exchange of stock, and I think it may be safely estimated that for not one per cent. of the animals is any certificate, much less guarantee, given or asked for. This is true even of high priced stock. I doubt very much if any improvement in this respect can be registered from year to year. Moreover, while there are many genuine auction sales, and the sale may serve a very useful purpose in the interests of live stock, it is reasonable to suppose, in fact there is reason

to believe, that not infrequently disease is the origin of the sale. What is true of the public sale is also too true of private sale, but of the two the auction is apt to work on a larger scale.

By-products from creamery and cheese factory are without doubt another fertile channel. Pasteurization is a simple and effective safeguard. It would mean some extra outlay and some added expense which perhaps the war may hinder for some little time, but which would be a sound investment and which should be made compulsory at the earliest possible moment. It has been optional too long, and like many other forms of so-called liberty is more often rank injustice and thoroughly undemocratic.

Purebred Stock and the Purebred Herd.

It is a regrettable fact that there is a great deal of tuberculosis among our purebred herds, and that they are often fountain-heads for distribution. The grade or mongrel herd is an easier proposition to deal with, purely because of commercial value. The loss over and above beef value is not great; whereas, in the purebred the apparently higher value makes it seem necessary to retain the infected animal, or dispose of it on a breeding value basis, thereby peddling the disease. Notorious animal pedlars of this kind have not been uncommon. There is reason to believe that the imported animal, with nothing more than a punched ear to discourage him, has made no small contribution to tuberculosis in this country. The time has long since gone by when some means should have been devised to prohibit the importation of recognized infectious disease. This is one obstacle, presenting difficulties no doubt, but which can and should be overcome.

Tuberculin Use and Abuse.

The prevailing attitude on the part of the partially informed is not one of confidence in tuberculin testing. To the selfishly inclined, and this is no small class, the shortcomings of the test naturally make a greater appeal than do its ad-